

S E R M O N

DELIVERED *July 31st, 1768.*

Being the LORD'S-DAY after the News of the

DEATH of

DANIEL OLIVER, Esq;

ELDEST SON

To the Hon. PETER OLIVER, Esq; of *Middleborough.*

Who departed this LIFE,

On a Voyage to *Europe* for the Recovery of his HEALTH.

April 22^d, 1768. Ætatis 30. *K*

By SYLVANUS CONANT, A. M.
Pastor of the first Church in MIDDLEBOROUGH.

1 Sam. iii. 18. It is the LORD; let him do what seemeth him good.

For I esteem that better which GOD wills, than that which I will.

Epictetus, a Philosopher and Slave.

B O S T O N:

Printed by MEIN and FLEEMING.
MDCCLXVIII.

S E R M O N

DELIVERED

Being the Lord's-day after the Resurrection

DEATH

DANIEL OLIVER



of the Hon. the

He departed this life

and voyage to heaven for the recovery of his health

On the 17th of March 1788

BY SYLVANUS CONANT

Pastor of the First Church in Middletown

1 Sam. xiii. 18. It is the LORD: let him do what seemeth him good.

For I know that there is nothing GOD will withhold from me.

B O S T O N

Printed by NEVIN and FLEMING
MDCCLXXXVIII

S E R M O N

On the DEATH of

DANIEL OLIVER, Esq;

JOB I. 21. *The LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the Name of the LORD.*

THESE words of pious and patient *Job* are expressive, not only of the deep and affecting sense he had of the providence of GOD, both in the good and evil things he met with, but they evidently suggest to us the serene, calm and heavenly temper of mind that he was now in the exercise of, which temper of mind shone with the more eminent lustre, as it was exercised in a time when he was under the most trying and alarming outward circumstances; when a shade, very gloomy and extensive, was cast over him, and almost every thing that was dear and pleasant to him in the world, as we are informed in the preceding part of the chapter; wherein, we have his character, family, wealth, and exalted station in life; as also, his sudden reduction to a state of extreme poverty

and solitude, represented to us in a very striking point of light.

His character, especially the religious part of it, which is first of all taken notice of, is a most excellent one. — He was a very holy man, *perfect and upright, one that feared GOD, and eschewed or avoided evil.* Where can we find a more amiable character among mankind than this? His heart was right with GOD in an eminent degree; purity, sincerity, and the principles of undefiled religion prevailed and reigned in him; he feared GOD with a truly reverential and filial fear, and avoided sin as the most evil and detestable thing; His devotion to the ALMIGHTY was, not only inward and cordial, but, explicit and evident to those that were about him; and his benevolent and charitable conduct, was testified unto by the poor, the blind, the oppressed, the fatherless and the widow, to whom he afforded the most timely and sensible relief.

With regard to his family, it was numerous and flourishing; his wealth and outward estate exceeded any of the men of the East, and as for his exalted station in life, it appears from *Chap. xxix, ver. 25th*, that he was the chief Magistrate in the kingdom where he dwelt; for he saith of himself and no one contradicted him, *I chose out their way, and sat chief, and dwelt as a King in the army, as one that comforteth the mourners:* From whence we may justly conclude, that he was a wise and compassionate ruler, and that he improved his

Death of Daniel Oliver, Esq;

talents, his opulence and high betrustments to the general benefit and advantage of the people; and,

When it is said, *that this man was the greatest of all the men of the East*. I suppose we are at once to take into our view, his amiable character, high station, and affluent circumstances in life, which, taken together, must give us an exalted idea of him; he shone in honour, was deservedly respected by the people, and was surrounded with plenty; while his children and friends gave a peculiar relish to all his other enjoyments; but

By the next information we have about him, we behold him suddenly brought low, and reduced to extreme poverty and solitude. He was bereaved of his riches, sons and daughters in a very extraordinary manner; and without any previous warning, as we are told by the history of the matter, on which we may only touch with the greatest brevity.

While one messenger was informing him, that *the Sabeans fell upon the oxen and asses, took them away and slew the servants that were with them*; a second came in with tidings, that *the fire of GOD had fallen from heaven and burnt up the sheep and the servants*; And while he was yet speaking, a third came hastily in, and said, *the Chaldeans fell upon the camels and have carried them away, yea, and slain the servants with the edge of the sword, and I only am escaped alone to tell thee*. Surprising news! Destruction upon destruction rag

swiftly thro' his earthly substance, and laid it waste as in a moment ; yet the good man was silent and all composed, under the becalming influence of patience and profound submission. But the trial was not over ; for while the *third* messenger was yet speaking, a *fourth* entered, with tidings more affecting, more pungent and painful than all the rest : While he was hearing the loss of his earthly substance ; tho' it was very great, he kept silence ; but when the news came, that while his seven sons and three daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother's house, there came a great wind from the wilderness, and smote the four corners of the house, so that it fell upon the young men, and they were dead ; all his bowels were then moved—he was touched to the heart—his whole frame, body and soul, was deeply affected : and no wonder, for he saw himself, at once, bereaved, and stript naked of his earthly substance, his servants and children.

Then Job arose, and rent his robe, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshipped : worshipped the Almighty GOD himself, before whom he fell down prostrate in the most humble, reverential, and submissive posture, without yet speaking a word. His great soul was full of sensation, and full of devotion too ; and being now all prostrate before the majesty of the great GOD, he began to speak, not the language of a stupid, fainting, or murmuring heart, but of undisguised humility, gratitude, and calm submission.

He said, and no doubt he spoke the true sentiments of his heart, *naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave all my enjoyments, my wealth, my family, sons and daughters, with every temporary blessing, and the LORD hath taken away those agreeable things which he was pleased to give me; blessed be the name of the LORD:* "I acknowledge his high and
"mighty hand: I extol and adore his infinite
"excellency and perfections; which are con-
"cerned in these, and in every act of his go-
"vernment: I gratefully own him the author
"of all my blessings, my wealth, my friends, my
"sons and my every comfort; the whole of
"which, came flowing to me from his free and
"bountiful goodness; and I give him my hear-
"ty thanks that he was pleased to indulge me
"those unmerited favours so long: I do also
"humbly adore and submit to his bereaving
"Providence in recalling the favours he lent
"to me: and being fully convinced that he
"has a just right to remand what his rich
"and sovereign goodness lent. I do most cor-
"dially acquiesce and rest easy, pleased and
"contented in his administration, the rectitude
"of which, I neither dispute nor doubt; he is
"holy, just and good in what he has done,
"and I am satisfied in the same."

This, I take to be the true spirit and sense of the text; and what a charming idea does it give us, of the excellent disposition of his mind, under the series of sudden, extensive

and extraordinary bereavments he met with ? By this temper and deportment under his trials, it is evident he disappointed his great adversary, the devil, who (so far as he had a hand in the matter) intended to make the good man faint, or fret and murmur against the *Lord* ; whereas quite the reverse of this, he took all well at the hand of GOD ; and by resting easy and satisfied in the divine conduct, from a conviction of the intire rectitude of it, he gave much glory to GOD : being full in the belief of a divine Providence, his soul rose, as it were, above satan and all his temptations, and looking thro' and beyond second causes, he beheld, ~~and~~ and calmly submitted to the hand of GOD alone. From the words viewed in this light, we have the following

O B S E R V A T I O N.

It is the excellent spirit and character of a truly pious man, with all humility and submission, to acknowledge the Providence of GOD, both in giving and recalling the blessings of life, and to acquiesce in the same.

While other persons, in a time of adversity, employ their time and their thoughts in poring on secondary causes, means, and the instruments of their woe ; faulting one, censuring another, and then looking forward to imaginary consequences of the present evil, whereby their minds are led off from GOD, and the operations of his hand ; the truly pious man is employed in viewing, acknowledging, and

adoring the providence, the influence and government of *Him* who presides over all the works of his hands, ordering, directing, or permitting every thing that comes to pass. Here,

First, That the LORD himself is the giver of all the blessings of life we enjoy, is not to be disputed. As we have received our existence, so we have all our supports, and every agreeable thing we enjoy from the bounteous hand of his providence. Are we possessors of the blessings of health, wealth, friends, peace, plenty, or any of the delights of life? They flow from the fullness of *Him* who *giveth to all life and breath, and all things.** We are possessors of nothing that is good and agreeable, but what we are indebted and accountable to him for; and whenever we reflect upon any of the blessings we enjoy, we may say with the strictest truth, *the LORD gave it.*

Secondly. His providence is also concerned in the *removal* of the blessings of life, when they are removed from us. We are deprived of none of the blessings of this life but what the LORD deprives us of, either by way of permission, or by withholding his sustaining influence, or by what is commonly called an immediate act of his providence.

To say, that means and instruments are used in the matter, is no argument at all against a divine providence; for, make the most of them, they are no more than the servants

* Acts xvii. 25.

of GOD ; and they, with all the laws of nature, are entirely and constantly under his controul. Should it please the ALMIGHTY to cease supporting and preserving any one comfort of life, that comfort would drop, and immediately depart from us ; the same may be said of a second, a third, and all we have ; yea, life itself. If he should withhold his supporting influence but a moment from me, I must die ; and the case would be the same with you, and with every creature upon earth that has the breath of life : *Thou takest away their breath, they die, and return to their dust :** Yea, it would be so with angels—devils, and all the living creation throughout the unbounded universe ; for the withholding of his supporting influence from each individual, would have the same effect upon the whole, that it would have upon you or me.

From this view of the matter, it appears that we ourselves, and all that we have, are intirely dependant on GOD for continuance ; and of consequence, that his providence is concerned immediately in the removal of any blessing that is taken from us. To this purpose, it is said in the divine oracles—*The LORD killeth and maketh alive ; he bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up. The LORD maketh poor, and maketh rich ; he bringeth low, and lifteth up. He will keep the feet of his saints, and the wicked shall be*

* Psalm civ. 29.

Alent in darkness : * Whatever may be said of second causes, it is plain that the divine providence is immediately concerned, not only in giving, but in taking away the blessings of life ; so that when any, or all of those blessings are removed from us, we may justly adopt the language of *Job*, and say, *The LORD hath taken away*. And

Thirdly, He has a right so to do, Since we, and all that we have, are entirely his own property ; he has a just and unalienable right to dispose of us and ours, according to his mind : nor have we any more right to controul him, than we have power so to do, which is none at all. If any, under the bereaving stroke of his hand, are so audaciously wicked, as to say unto the ALMIGHTY, *What doest thou ?* He may reply, with infinite justice (if he will condescend so to do) and say, *Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with my own ?* And who, with the least colour of reason, can say, it is not ? To say, that he has given us our being and blessings, is true ; but to say, that he has given them as our own property, exclusively and independantly, is false. He holds his authority over us, and his right to dispose of us, and all we have, according to his sovereign pleasure, for we remain his intire property, and *his dominion ruleth over all*. Therefore,

Fourthly, It becomes us to acknowledge and

* 1 Sam. ii. 6, 7, 8.

§ Matt. xx. 15.

acquiesce in both these parts of his administration, *i. e.* in giving and recalling the blessings of life as he pleaseth; and we have the highest reason so to do; for we are to view him, not merely as an absolute sovereign, who rules by his power alone, but as a moral, or, in other words, as an infinitely wise, holy, good, and righteous governor, who gives, withholds and remands according to the sublimest rules of justice and goodness; nor is it any more possible for him to deviate from these rules, in any one instance of his administration, than to deny himself, which we are assured he cannot do.—Hence, we have the highest reason to acknowledge him with all thankfulness in every blessing we enjoy; and, with all humility and submission, to acquiesce in his conduct when he reassumes what he lent to us.

Howbeit, 'tis not every one, nor indeed but very few, who do this upon a just conviction, from proper principles, and in a right manner; for though we generally profess that Almighty GOD is the author of all our blessings, and verbally acknowledge his providence in the bereavements we sustain; yet, by reason of the introduction of the evil principle of sin into our rational nature, the prejudice, moral blindness, unbelief, and perverseness of our minds and hearts are such, that without the especial, supernatural and powerful influence of divine grace in our souls, removing the power of those moral evils, and renewing us in the spirit of our minds, we shall by no means perceive the ex-

cellency, rectitude, and fitness of the divine administration; and, not perceiving this, it is morally impossible for us, understandingly, cordially, and quietly to rest in the same as holy, just and good. We may, indeed, by the force of reason and the clearness of explicit evidence, be, as it were, compelled to believe a GOD, and a providence; and because we are unable to prevent what happens, we may possibly, by repeated efforts, produce in ourselves, such a frame as we suppose is a submission to his power, and the bereaving stroke of his hand, while yet our hearts are firmly attached to some wrong object, and far from being right with GOD. *When he slew them, then they sought him, &c.* * but till we are enlightened and renewed by the distinguishing grace of GOD, the prevailing sense and bias of our hearts lie in direct opposition to that providence which takes from us any of the dear and peculiar delights of life. When the thing is done, and we are bereaved, the common saying is, *we must submit*, and we do so in a sort, not because we see, believe, and feel, that what is done is right, just and good, and so acquiesce in it understandingly and cheerfully; but we submit, because the thing is done, and we can't help it; though, at the same time, we may be heartily sorry for what GOD has done, and wish he had done otherwise, which is implicitly wishing that he had done better. This is the prevailing sense of those who are unbelieving and ~~unfettered~~.

unfettered

* Psalm lxxviii. 34—37.

They are not in good subjection to the government of GOD, nor willing, easy and contented that he should do what he thinks best with the good things they enjoy; and they are uneasy and unsubmitive (if they are not quite stupid) under the correction of his hand. Whereas,

Fifthly, It is the spirit and practice of the truly pious man, to acknowledge, and acquiesce in the divine conduct, even when bereaved of the nearest and dearest earthly delight. *Blessed be the name of the LORD*, is the language of his heart; and with *Eli* he sayeth, *It is the LORD, let him do what seemeth him good*; * content, that myself, my children, and all that I have, be disposed of, as he, in his infinite wisdom and goodness sees fit.

And, let it be observed, that this acknowledgment and acquiescence of the pious man, ariseth from a proper conviction, and heart-affecting perception of the divine character, and of the wisdom, goodness, and perfect rectitude of his conduct. For

The spirit and grace of GOD from on high, have been poured upon him in a saving manner, whereby he has, not only been thoroughly convinced of the prejudices of his heart, his universal guiltiness, unworthiness, and ill deserving at the hand of GOD; but has also had the power of his prejudices, and of every sinful *abit* ~~habit~~ broken; his mind renewed and enlightened, to perceive the excellency of the divine

character, as it shines in the revelation of his *truth and grace*, or, as it shines *in the face of JESUS CHRIST*; (in whom alone we can behold, so as to love his whole revealed character;) and whereby also, his heart has been formed and moulded into the pure, flexible and yielding temper of the gospel. This is what is done for the truly pious man.

Hence he acknowledgeth the hand of **GOD** in the bereavement he is under, because he perceives and believes that **GOD** hath done it; he realizeth, that, this or that affliction was not a meer chance, that it rose not from *the dust*, nor *sprang out of the ground*, but came forth from *the LORD of Hosts, which is wonderful in council, and excellent in working*;* and was done, under observation of his eye, and by the permission, or influence and direction of his infinitely wise, good and holy hand.

From this view and perception of **GOD**, there ariseth in the good man, an understanding and hearty submission, which is attended with a serene acquiescence of soul in the divine conduct, the same is imported in the answer that the woman of *Shunem* gave to the servant of the prophet *Elisba*, when he asked her, *Is it well with thee? Is it well with thy husband? Is it well with the child?* She answered, *It is well.* § Tho' she knew her son was dead, and her heart deeply affected with the loss, yet the answer imports, that she was well satisfied as to the rectitude of what was done, and that she

* Isa. xxviii. 29.

§ 2 Kings iv. 26.

enjoyed a religious serenity of mind under the bereavement.

What has been said, gives us, in brief, a representation of the spirit and temper, found in every truly pious man; and what I say, is, it is a most excellent one; for in the exercise thereof, they are not only sensible of, and readily acknowledge their own sinfulness and unworthiness; but with all humility, filial affection and reverence, they ascribe righteousness to their maker, and take every thing well that he does: They humbly rejoice in his government, while, under all his dispensations, they are careful to walk and behave so as to please him. Hereby they give glory to GOD, and evidence, that they shall finally emerge from all evils, and rise to the perfect state of holiness and happiness in the glorious presence and full enjoyment of GOD forever.

I M P R O V E M E N T,

Does the LORD give, and take away the blessings of life, as he, in his infinite wisdom and goodness seeth fit? And is it the spirit and practice of the truly pious man, to acknowledge and acquiesce in his *providence*? Hence we may collect a great variety of useful and improving lessons, for our instruction, support and consolation,

I. We ought deeply to fix in our minds a sense and belief of his particular providence, in the removal of any of the blessings of life, as

well as in the bestowment of them. And indeed, if we don't believe his particular providence herein, we have no solid ground on which to fix a true and lasting submission. If we disbelieve *his* providence, when a friend is taken from us, we are all afloat at once, and our minds are tossed too and fro on the waves of uncertainty, blind chance, and uneasy suspicion, as to the rectitude, justice, and goodness of what is done; whereas, if we look on second causes to be only the servants of the Almighty Sovereign, and entirely under his controul; if we view and consider the hand of GOD in what we meet with, and believe it to be done under the observation of his eye, with the allowance or influence of his power, and guided by the sublimest wisdom and goodness, we at once see that all is right; here is a firm solid basis for intire resignation, and the most serene and lasting submission. And, since it is true; in fact, that his providence presideth over all things, and is concerned in every event, so that not an hair of our head falls to the ground without it: Hence we ought to believe it, in the removal of any blessing of life; for, whatever second hand may be employed in the matter, that hand, was under the designed permission or influence of GOD himself.

II. This may serve to check and suppress every murmuring thought in the time of affliction.

The due consideration of the hand of GOD, in ordering or suffering the affliction, has a

mighty tendency to expel from our hearts the evil motions of repining and fretting against him. We have no just cause of uneasiness, under the correction of his hand, only at sin and at ourselves, for misimproving the favours he lent to us ; for ingratitude, and the numerous irregularities of our hearts and lives ; for these things we have reason to pass the severest censures upon ourselves, and to feel the sharpest grief and godly sorrow. But, at those acts of providence, which bereave us of a friend, or of any peculiar comfort of life, we have no cause of grief, or any uneasiness at all ; for, we neither merited those comforts we enjoyed, nor had we the least right to keep them a moment longer than we did enjoy them. If it had not been best to remove them when he did ; his infinite wisdom would have seen it, and his goodness would have prevented it. This consideration suggests to us the highest reason for dismissing from our hearts, every uneasy, murmuring, and rebellious motion ; and, with all humility, patience and submission, to ascribe righteousness to our maker ; and say with Job, *shall we, (guilty, unworthy and ill deserving creatures,) receive good at the hand of the LORD, and shall we not receive evil* ?* And with the church under the hiding of GOD's face. *I will bear the indignation of the LORD, because I have sinned against him, until he plead my cause.* § How very becoming, for us sinners, under the rebukes of providence, to ex-

ercise such a submissive temper of mind, and how indecent and criminal is the contrary temper.

Shall the sinner, who has forfeited every blessing, deserves to be stript of every comfort, and merits nothing but destruction from the ALMIGHTY, murmur, because out of the countless number of his undeserved comforts, it pleases the LORD to remove one or two? or shall the Christian, who is restored by sovereign grace to the love and friendship of GOD, murmur, because it pleaseth his heavenly Father to discipline him, either for the trial of his faith and patience, or for the faults and follies of his life? How unreasonable is it? *If we have had fathers of our flesh, which corrected us, and we gave them reverence; shall we not much rather be in subjection to the Father of spirits?** And,

In case we are truly pious—have believed with the heart unto righteousness, and faithfully committed the keeping of our souls to the Redeemer; we have these further considerations to check our murmuring under the bereavements of his providence, viz. whatever he is pleased to take from us in this world, he will never take out our names from the lamb's book of life—our interest in his covenant and love—our title to the kingdom of glory—nor ever take away his holy spirit from us—these inestimable blessings are secured to us by his promise and faithfulness, and these being se-

* Heb. xii. 9.

cured to us ; how can we find a heart to murmur at his removing some of the small streams of earthly delight, especially since by the removing them he intends to gain the more entire submission and devotion of our souls to himself, and form us for the perfect state of heaven ? O then, let us cease from murmuring under the discipline of our heavenly Father—banish every uneasy and rebellious thought from our breasts—and, with ourselves, resign all that we have to his disposal, without the least prescription to his infinite wisdom and goodness. But,

III. Unless we are possessors of the spirit and temper of the truly pious, we can't reasonably expect to behave under bereavements as they do ; for we have no moral foundation in us, whence to exercise that peculiar submission to, and spirited acquiescence in the divine government and discipline, which they exercise.

While we are under the power of prejudice, moral blindness, and a criminal attachment to creatures ; we do not perceive the glory of the divine character, as it shines in revelation, where he is stiled, *A just GOD and SAVIOUR* ;* nor the rectitude of his government, and not perceiving these, nor yet being reconciled to the divine governor himself, we have no moral principles in us for the above-mentioned exercise. Being destitute of the pure spirit of religion, of faith and holiness ; the prevailing principles in us are con-

trary to GOD and his ways. Hence, in the course of his government, when he acts contrary to our inclination and sinful attachments, our hearts oppose him; and tho' we cannot succeed against him, yet we feel against him; are inwardly displeased with what he has done, and vainly wish he had acted otherwise. This temper of heart is most sensibly perceived at the removal of what is nearest and dearest to us; tho' it is often perceived under crosses and losses that are less considerable.

And indeed, unless we are possessors of the Christian faith and spirit, we shall never understandingly and cordially acquiesce, or rest easy and satisfied with his government, and when he toucheth us in a tender part, instead of a calm, submissive, self-condemning temper of heart, a temper that will vindicate all the ways of GOD; we shall be restless, uneasy at his conduct, and as the prophet speaks, *like the troubled sea when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt**.

Therefore, to be prepared for the exercise of Christian submission, patience and quietness under bereavements, it is necessary that we view and believe the glorious and gracious character of GOD as it shines in the gospel, and that we love his whole character and government. This faith and love being active in us, will turn our hearts, like the wax to the seal, into the most easy and animated submission, patience, and Christian contentment, under

any bereaving stroke of providence. This is a most excellent disposition. And

IV. Being possesst of this spirit and temper, let us cultivate it upon all occasions and under all trials, by keeping in our minds, a wakeful sense and full belief of the universal wisdom and goodness of the divine dispensations.

Hereby, our minds will be quieted, and our passions smoothed into an heavenly calm, amidst the greatest storms we meet with in the world. We shall be quick to discern *the rod and him that has appointed it*; and our hearts being tender, we shall easily submit, and chearfully acquiesce in what is done. We shall see that it is in covenant love and faithfulness that he chastiseth us; and seeing this, our hearts can't but be affected, and melted into filial submission, even under correction. If a child, when corrected, is convinced that his parent does it in love, the correction will be so far from alienating the child from his parent, that it will rather confirm and increase his affection and submission; so it will be in this case; if we perceive that the design of GOD in chastening us is kind and gracious; *i. e.* to disengage us from sin, the world, and the inordinate love of creatures, and to bring us nearer unto himself, it will mightily tend to soften our hearts into an easy subjection. It was a fine reflection of an excellent lady, when news was brought her of the sudden death of two of her

children whom she dearly loved, "I see GOD will have all my heart, and he shall have it."

Nothing is more reasonable than the entire devotion of our hearts and our all unto Him; and therefore when he is pleased, in the course of his providence, to take from us a friend, or any of the delights of life, instead of its driving us away, it should draw us nearer to him; and this will be the case, as certain as that we exercise the Christian temper; for the exercise of that temper is, in itself, a calm, submissive, and even thankful frame of heart under providences, prosperous and adverse; which is a temper of mind that ought always to be cultivated.

V. We should never suffer a present evil to obliterate the sense of former mercies.

It is a bad temper of mind to forget, or to pass over with neglect, the former loving-kindness of the LORD, because he is pleased to recal one or two of the comforts of life, from the many he hath lent to us. Though we ought to reflect on our past conduct, when we are under the correction of his hand, and carefully enquire what we have done, and wherein we have misimproved his favour, that has moved him to take it from us; yet it would be high ingratitude to let a present bereavement rase from our minds a thankful acknowledgment of the past blessings of his providence.

The fine examples of *Job*, *David*, and many others, when under afflictions, teach us to ac-

knowledge the goodness of GOD—to remember the years of the right hand of the most high, and to bless his holy name for past mercies, even while we feel the smart of his rod in a present bereavement.

The want of a submissive and grateful temper of heart, under an affliction is the way, both to increase the weight of the affliction, and add to our sins; the latter of which, we should dread above all things, and always be upon our guard against offending GOD when under the the correction of his hand, as well as against unnecessarily afflicting ourselves; of both which evils we are relieved by a grateful remembrance of past mercies, and a submissive temper under present afflictions.

But we have such evil hearts of unbelief and perverseness, and are under so many sinful imperfections and temptations, that we need the divine aid and influence, to uphold us under trials, and enable us to behave so as to honour GOD; which consideration suggests another improving thought.

VI. Is it the LORD that bereaveth us when we are bereaved? This ought to lead us unto him for support under the bereavment, and for assistance to behave in a Christian manner.

When we are smitten of the LORD, the direction is, to turn unto him that smiteth us, and spread our afflicted case, our complaints and desires before his face; as Job in a like circumstance desired to do: *O that I knew*

where I might find him, that I might come even to his seat, &c.* Turning away our eyes and hearts from all other objects, we should do as the bereaved disciples did, when they heard of the death of *John the baptist*, they went and told *Jesus*; and to whom else shall we go but unto him? He has the words of eternal life; the words of instruction, support, and consolation; and he kindly invites us to make known our wants unto him: to do which, we have the most animating encouragement, particularly from the consideration of that affecting part of his divine commission, which is, *to comfort them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness*; from whence it appears, that pious mourners may apply unto him most freely, and without any annoying fears, either of being rebuked or neglected. *The bowels of a father are with him*, and being touched with a feeling of our infirmities, he graciously calls us to pour our souls into his bosom, and cast our burden upon him, not doubting but he will supply all our wants; and make up to us in himself, what he is pleased to take from us in the creature.

We always stand in need of his support and assistance in every time of affliction, and under every bereavment; but in some cases we do more so than in others; because some bereavments are more painful and pungent; as

* Job xxiii. 2, 3, 4.

for instance in general, when we are called to part with a friend that is eminently and deservedly near and dear to us, and in whom we have taken singular delight.

Particularly, when it pleaseth almighty GOD, by an act of his providence, to take from the arms and enjoyment of tender and indulgent parents, an agreeable and beloved *Son*, in the full bloom and glory of life, and in circumstances that filled them with the hope of lasting consolation—who was furnished by the great and bountiful author of nature, from whom descendeth *every good and perfect gift*, with a great variety of most amiable qualities, which being cultivated and improved by diligence and unwearied application, shone clearer and brighter as he advanced in years—who, from his early youth, and through all the after stages of life, even to the last and parting moment, discovered a most excellent disposition, leaving behind him an example worthy of imitation, whose dutiful behaviour, which was free, chearful, and constant, appeared to spring from the principles of sincere and filial reverence, respect, and warm affection—who was tenderly concerned for their honour, support, and comfort, and never thought he could do enough to retaliate them for their parental care and goodness; endeavouring always, in every branch of his conduct, to render himself both agreeable and useful—who was steadily and practically attentive to the welfare, peace, and prosperity of the family—the firm-

ness and constancy of whose friendship endeared him to his particular acquaintance; while his modest, open, obliging, and virtuous behaviour unto all, rendered him greatly beloved and justly respected—and whose knowledge and distinguished fidelity, capacity, and attention made him both a safe confident, and an improved member in civil community: so that he was truly an ornament, as well as a pleasant and useful member, both of the family and society to which he belonged: And finally, his constant attendance on, and decent behaviour in, the publick worship of GOD, with other tokens of his sincere and sacred regard to religion, gave them a comfortable hope that he was truly pious toward GOD, as well as conspicuously virtuous toward man.

Other affecting circumstances of such a bereavment might be added, if it were needful; but as to the propriety of reflecting on the above mentioned amiable qualities and conduct, when they have shone with an observable lustre, if any are in doubt, the words, of an inspired apostle may abundantly satisfy us. *Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue, if there be any praise, think on these things.**

And what I say is, that when Almighty GOD, is pleased, by the stroke of death, to bereave

parents of such a son, and a family and community of such a member, they greatly need the divine support, and are eminently called to make application to that GOD who is *the hope of Israel, and the Saviour thereof in the time of trouble*,* for the communication of his grace, to assist and enable them to a right improvement of the same.

May the infinitely gracious and merciful GOD, assist, support and comfort, such parents with the needful influences and consolations of his holy spirit; that, with all humility, serenity and submission of soul, they may adopt the words of the text, *The LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away, blessed be the name of the LORD*; and say with *David* the royal saint, when he had news of the death of his son, (using the plural for the singular) *Now he is dead, wherefore should we fast? can we bring him back again? We shall go to him, but he shall not return to us.*||

May the surviving brethren of such an one deceased, hear that voice of GOD our Saviour, *Be ye also ready, for at such an hour as ye think not, the son of man cometh*. May it be their first concern, to secure an interest in the love and friendship of him, who alone can take away the sting of death, and prepare them by his grace for the inheritance of everlasting life; that being formed for glory and virtue; they may shine in all the Christian graces, and grow

up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ, till the great arbiter of life shall transmit them also to the eternal world?

May the spirit of GOD be poured upon the whole society, to impress our minds with a just and affecting sense of his holy hand in the be-
lievements and corrections we are under; and, persuade us to turn unto him with all our hearts and faithfully devote ourselves, and all that we have to his honour and service!

Lastly, Let us all be excited, by every act of providence, that takes away any of the delights of life, especially the distinguished blessing of agreeable friends, by the stroke of death, to remember, and often think of, the important period, when the sovereign LORD of life will take us away also. Let us be alarmed by such alarming calls, to prepare for the
ing change of death; a change, to which we are all hastening, swift as the fleeting moments of time are passing; and by which, we shall soon be transmitted to the unalterable state of joys unspeakable, or pains intolerable and eternal.

To be prepared for that change, which, *will* come certainly, and *may* suddenly, is an affair that concerneth us more than every thing else in the world; and ought to engage our utmost attention: For, every moment we are unprepared, we are in hazard of losing, not only our mortal life, but our immortal souls too. The reason why we are in hazard of losing our souls, is, because we are sinful creatures, and neglect the only Saviour, and seeing there

is no other way of redemption from sin, wrath and ruin, unto the favour, love, and enjoyment of GOD, but through faith in him who *came to take away sin by the sacrifice of himself*, and through whom alone GOD is *reconciling the world unto himself*; therefore it is of the greatest importance, and what immediately concern the everlasting well-fare of our souls, that we sensible of our guilty, wretched, and ruined condition, do credit the record which is given of *CHRIST* in the gospel; and *believe on the name of the only begotten son of GOD*, with such a faith as purifieth the heart, worketh by love, and produceth unfeigned submission, and evangelical obedience to GOD our Saviour.—

Without the faith which is productive of these we are not prepared to die; nor can we with safety before the enlightened trial of GOD, our final judge.

Let us seriously consider of these things; and may GOD, of his infinite mercy, pour upon us his holy spirit, to inspire us with faith and every Christian grace, and enable us to evidence the goodness of our faith, by the purity, piety and obedience of our lives; that when he shall please to take us away by death, we may be favoured with an open and abundant entrance into his glorious presence and heavenly kingdom, *through Jesus Christ our Lord.*
Amen.